

Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church
Spring Branch Creek
Rodney
Jefferson County
Mississippi

HABS No. MS-208

(moved to:
Grand Gulf Military Monument Park
Port Gibson
Claiborne County
Mississippi)

HABS
MISS,
32-ROD,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS
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SACRED HEART ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

HABS No. MS-208

Location: Spring Branch Creek, Rodney, Jefferson County,
Mississippi
(moved to: Grand Gulf Military Monument Park,
Port Gibson, Claiborne County, Mississippi 39150)

Present Owner: State Department of Archives and History

Present Use: The building was moved to the Grand Gulf Military
Monument Park and restored by the Claiborne County
Board of Supervisors. It is presently open to the
public.

Significance: Sacred Heart is probably the most outstanding of the
few remaining examples of carpenter Gothic church
architecture in Mississippi. The structure was the
scene of the christening of Charles P. Greco, the first
Mississippian to become a Roman Catholic Bishop.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1868
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: Book L, pages 565, 566, 567, of
the records of deeds of Jefferson County (November 15, 1867)
state that the property described below was conveyed by warranty
deed on November 14, 1867, to William H. Elder by George Hay and
wife for a consideration of \$500.00. The property was described
as follows: "Commencing at a stake eighteen (18) feet south of
the southern margin or bank of a creek running through the lower
part of the town of Rodney, commonly known as Spring Branch,
said stake being on the east side of the road leading from
Rodney to Fayette and about opposite to the SE corner of the
bridge over said creek and twenty feet therefrom, same being
marked B on a plat of the said piece or parcel of land hereby
conveyed annexed hereto and made part of this deed; thence north
eighty-six and a quarter (86-1/4) degrees east eighty-six (86)
feet to "B"; thence south forty-nine and one-half (49-1/2°)
degrees east two hundred and twenty-four and one-half (224-1/2)
feet along the west bank of said creek to point "E," thence
south sixty (60) degrees west one hundred and fifty-six (156)
feet to point "F"; then north seventy-two (72°) west two
hundred and sixteen (216) feet to point "C" on said plat, same
being on the east side of the said Rodney and Fayette Road:
thence north thirty

(30) degrees east one hundred and seventy (170) feet to "B", the point of beginning, containing in all a fraction over an acre of land."

This property was subsequently conveyed to the Catholic Diocese of Natchez by Bishop Heslin on November 14, 1906, and is recorded in book 3-S, pp. 37, 38, December 14, 1906.

This property was conveyed to the Rodney Foundation, Inc. by the Catholic Diocese of Natchez-Jackson on February 25, 1969, and is recorded in Jefferson County deed book L, page 565.

In 1982, having determined that it could not restore and maintain the building, the Rodney Foundation gave the deconsecrated building to the state.

4. Builder: Patrick Murphy (1830-1925) built the church, negotiated for the land, and may have supplied the design.
5. Original plans and construction: The small rectangular church is constructed of frame with board and batten siding. The interior is finished with simple plaster walls, and wooden ceiling and floor. No bills, receipts, or original plans for the construction are known to exist.
6. Alterations and additions: A small addition which used the same materials and motifs as the existing structure was added sometime prior to 1900. The central tower no longer retains its original pinnacles and wooden crenelation. However, the building was completely restored following its removal to the Grand Gulf Military Monument Park.

B. Historical Context

In 1894, the church was the setting for the christening of the future Most Reverend Bishop Charles P. Greco, Bishop of the Diocese of Alexandria (Louisiana). Bishop Greco was the first Mississippian to become a Roman Catholic Bishop.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Sacred Heart is an excellent example of carpenter Gothic architecture with its board and batten siding, heavy label moldings and wooden pinnacles.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent (1984)

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 26' x 26', three bays, one-story, rectangular building.
2. Foundations: The church is set upon a series of brick piers.
3. Walls: The walls are frame and covered with a board and batten siding. The church is painted white.
4. Structural system: Wood frame
5. Porches, stoops: Small stoops without railings are located at the main and rear entrances to the church.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The entrance doorway is treated with a "Gothick" label molding which surrounds the double leaf door and paneled transom.
 - b. Windows: The narrow lancet windows are paired and placed within an opening of a similar outline and topped by a heavy label molding.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The mass of the church as well as the eastern addition have gabled roofs covered with tin.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: A sawn vergeboard, which is placed directly against the wall at the cornice level, joins with each batten to imitate narrow Gothic arches.
 - c. Tower: An entrance tower rises on the central axis and was originally treated with pinnacles and wooden crenelation.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The structure's simple rectangular plan contains a vestibule under the belfry, a nave, and a chancel containing a sanctuary in the recess formed by two rooms at the east end (probably a sacristy and an acolyte chamber).
2. Flooring: Wood
3. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are finished with smooth plaster and the ceiling is comprised of tongue-and-groove boarding.

4. Doorways and doors: Paneled doors are hung in simple architraves with molded backbands.
5. Decorative features: A large pointed arch, which springs from narrow paneled pilasters, frames the altar.

D. Site:

On its original site in Rodney, Jefferson County, the church was oriented in the traditional fashion with the entrance facade facing west. The church may be returned to its original site from its present site in the Grand Gulf Military Monument Park in Claiborne County, if and when the town of Rodney is restored.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Mississippi Department of Archives and History. National Register File. Jefferson County. Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church.

Telephone conversation with Kenneth Ppool, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, September 1984.

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